***Introduction***

***My Experience***

1. Introduce the congregation into a time when you judged somebody else or were judged by others;
   1. Briefly discuss the effects of that judgment on those who were judged, as well as, the ones doing the judging.

***Our Experience***

* 1. Our culture seems to vacillate, Between the idea that no one but God can judge us for our life choices and the seeming entitlement we feel to judge the life choices of others. It’s an odd place to be in, where we are constantly screaming about how we don’t want to be judged while simultaneously spending much of our leisure time (think: reality TV shows) judging others. This is not a new phenomenon by any account. It seems to be the reason Jesus preaches on judgment in Matthew 7. And while Jesus has harsh words about judging others for the very things we refuse to acknowledge in ourselves, we sometimes find ourselves confused about what these words actually mean. Does it mean there is no standard? No discipline? Anything goes?

***Transition to Scripture***

* 1. But maybe we are thinking about it all wrong. Maybe Jesus’s call for us to measure others by the measure we want to be judged isn’t a call to be harsher or to just throw up our hands and say anything goes. Perhaps it is a call to look at others, and ourselves, through a lens of grace. Maybe the fastest way to remove the plank is to stop looking for the speck of dust and to look on others, and ourselves, with the grace of God instead.

***Scripture***

Matthew 7:1-6 NRSV (1)"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. (2)For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. (3)Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? (4)Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? (5)You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (6)"Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

***Body***

***What God Tells Us***

1. Not an Isolated Command
   1. It is helpful and important to read verse 1 in conjunction with verse 2, which clarifies what verse 1 means.
   2. Verse 2 says that you will get back what you give out. This context is important because it is not saying that we will not receive judgment but that we will be judged with the same measure of harshness that we use toward others. Verse 2 turns verse 1 into a command that urges us toward compassion and grace: *Be on* *guard because you will be judged to the same degree you are judging those around you.*
2. What Measure Are We Using?
   1. It appears from the text the measure being used for judgment by Jesus’s peers is on a microscopic scale. Because the standard is so high, they are noticing and nitpicking the sawdust in others’ eyes. Sawdust is pretty imperceptible to a common observer, so in order to see it, you would have to be looking pretty closely for it.
   2. There’s also the consideration of the implication of what it means that even “a speck of dust” is being judged. Everybody gets something in their eye now and then. Usually a quick swipe or a blink resolves the issue. Jesus’s words here seem to imply that even our ordinary humanity—which leaves us vulnerable to sometimes getting dust in our eyes—is seen as condemnable in this culture. For the people of God, who understand themselves as created in God’s image and meant to reflect that image to others, this would certainly be a problematic standard to uphold.
   3. There is also the obvious issue of hypocrisy in that those who are making the harsh judgment about the speck of dust are not holding themselves to the same standard because they have a log in their own eye— something that is much harder and much more important to remove than a speck of dust.
   4. Finally, we must consider distortion. Having a log in one’s eye would certainly distort one’s vision. How could someone with that big of a vision impediment be trusted to make any fair or accurate judgments about what they see?
3. Commanded to Compassion, Not to Judgment
   1. Some interpret these verses as allowing judgment once the log is removed. But consider that removing the log from one’s own eye might resolve the issue entirely. A log could so completely distort one’s vision that, once it is removed, it becomes clear that the speck was never even there in the first place.
   2. Sometimes, when we put in the work to remove the log (often helped along by others journeying with us), we gain empathy and compassion that better position us to help others with their specks. But helping someone from a place of compassion and grace is entirely different than harshly judging someone.
      1. Consider the example of racial justice. We may be blinded by what is in our own eye, and not even realize it. Someone who has worked to remove the log from their own eye may be earnestly and prayerfully trying to help us with our speck so that we can see more clearly. It’s important that we view these efforts not as judgment but as the compassionate, gracious help we need. The process might still be painful—it never feels good to have something stuck in our eye, and the process of dislodging it often causes more pain before we find relief.
      2. Speaking truth is not the equivalent of judgment. This is an important distinction that often gets lost. Our conviction about our blind spots is an opportunity for us to grow. We must seek out truth tellers and learn to distinguish them from harsh judges. Truth tellers, unlike harsh judges, seek the well-being of those they are trying to correct, whereas harsh judges often have no interest in sustained, meaningful relationship.
      3. Judgment seeks to destroy and divide. Earnest care and compassion seek the well-being of the other person. We should be wary of those who point out faults for their own benefit, who seek to be praised for their correction of others, or who wish to say, “I told you so.” These are judges, not truth tellers.
      4. Likewise, we should embrace and be grateful for the truth tellers who humble themselves, take care of their own sin, and journey to help others from of a place of genuine humility. We can identify them by the ways they embody the fruit of the Spirit.
   3. Those who seek the destruction of others are like the dogs and pigs in verse 6. They seek only to attack and destroy.

***So What should the people do?***

1. Removing the Plank from Our Own Eyes
   1. Lent is a time of self-reflection, of fasting, and of repentance. Its purpose is to reveal to us the places we have fallen short of what God has called us to so that we might remove the things that hinder us and move deeper in our relationship with Christ. This is a season of removing planks.
   2. Removing a plank requires acknowledging that there *is* a plank. One of the challenges in this text is that the person with the plank is so busy looking for specks in the eyes of others that they don’t seem to recognize their own plank. We have to acknowledge that we often fail to recognize our own faults and sins— especially when we are busy pointing out the faults in others.
   3. Removing a plank requires surrender. It wouldn’t take a long conversation with a nurse or doctor to learn that removing something from a flailing person would be impossible. In order to have the object that is impairing us removed, we must surrender to having it removed in the first place. Surrendering to the work of the Spirit may require surrendering to accountability, listening to and learning from others, becoming comfortable with our own discomfort, therapy, spiritual disciplines, or any other ways the Spirit reveals to us that we need work.

***Transition to the Conclusion***

1. When we become people who have done the work to remove the plank from our own eyes, then we in turn can become the compassionate people who seek to remove the splinters and specks of dust from the eyes of others because then it is no longer about judgment, but about grace and healing.

***Conclusion***

***You Statements***

* 1. When we shift the focus away from the speck that is in everyone else’s eye to the plank in our own, we discover how far we have to go to live to the standards God has set for us. But most importantly, we are reminded of the immense grace of God.
  2. (Remind the people of the grace they have received. Remind them of the grace we must extend to others. Remind them that Jesus would have us to extend grace to all people, and that by extending grace to others we may also draw them closer to the Lord.)

***We Statements, what we as the church should do***

* 1. This season of Lent is a time to repent, reflect, and grow, but it should also be a reminder to us of the faithfulness and grace of God. God does not leave us in our mess but stoops in humility to draw near to us in the midst of it. God is gracious to forgive us, and the Spirit is present to help us grow and transform into Christlikeness.
  2. If the measure God is using to judge us is one of grace, how much more should we extend that grace to those around us? May we remember the grace Christ has extended to us, and extend it to others in turn. May grace ultimately be our measure as we seek to see all come to a place of healing and wholeness.